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Items for discussion and decision

Integrated economic statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session.[a] It contains an update on the work initiated by the Friends of the Chair in the area of integrated economic statistics and an inventory of groups engaged in the field of economic statistics (see annex). The Commission may wish to take note of the report.

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I, para. 2.

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I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-seventh session, the Statistical Commission recommended the establishment of Friends of the Chair, consisting of Member States and international organizations, to prepare a concept paper on the modalities of the integrated approach to economic statistics. Such a concept paper should reflect the modalities for both national and international statistical systems in the domain of economic statistics. In terms of national statistical systems, the concept paper should bring together and evaluate existing country approaches. In the international context, the review should assess the work programme of existing work groups established by international and regional agencies and their coordination mechanisms.

2. The present note informs the Commission about the creation of the Friends of the Chair and the initial stage of its functioning. A report of the Friends of the Chair on integrated economic statistics will be prepared for the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

II. Establishment of the Friends of the Chair

A. Composition of the Friends of the Chair

3. The Friends of the Chair on integrated economic statistics has been created and its membership includes representatives of the national statistical offices of 11 countries (Australia, Canada, China, India, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Switzerland and United States of America) and four international organizations (European Central Bank, Statistical Office of the European Communities, International Monetary Fund and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Adelheid Bürgi-Schmelz, the Director General of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, agreed to serve as moderator of the Friends of the Chair.

B. Work in progress

4. The Friends of the Chair is at an early stage of its work, cognizant that this important step by the international community should be taken in conjunction with other elements of the international work programme, such as the revision of the *System of National Accounts, 1993* and consultations among its members on the direction of work started in 2006. The group is in the process of formulating well defined deliverables and related specific activities to be undertaken in 2007 that will help to develop a concept paper on the modalities of the integrated approach to economic statistics. The outcome of the work will be included in the report of the Friends of the Chair to be submitted to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session.

5. As an initial step, the Friends of the Chair focused on the need to gain sufficient knowledge about the subject matter and level of coordination among international organizations and work groups involved in economic statistics with the understanding that a proliferation of committees and work groups should be avoided. To this end, existing groups actively engaged in various areas of economic statistics, their activities, outputs and the support given to coordination with

international organizations, have been identified and are listed in the annex. An evaluation of that information should reveal if there are gaps or overlaps in the functions of groups and help to determine what improvements are needed to ensure that all domains of economic statistics are covered. Such findings, together with the views and experience of national statistical offices and international organizations on the conceptual underpinnings and feasibility of an integrated approach to economic statistics are expected to contribute, through further activities of the Friends of the Chair, to the development of the concept paper on the integrated approach to economic statistics.

6. Under the leadership of the moderator, the Friends of the Chair is actively engaged in determining key issues on which the project should focus. A communication framework has been set up and members are in contact to adopt a programme of work and reach agreement on a timeline for the work ahead. Several members have offered their views on the content of the concept paper or commented on proposals by other members. In the ongoing exchange of views, members expressed their strong commitment to move the project forward to prepare the concept paper as requested by the Statistical Commission.

Annex

Inventory of groups engaged in the field of economic statistics

A. Expert groups

Objective/date of creation/website	*Membership*	*Product/output/main achievements*
Expert Group on the Measurement of Non-Financial Assets (Canberra II)		
Established in 2003 to undertake work on the research agenda established by the original Expert Group on Capital Stock Statistics (Canberra I) and to research issues associated with the measurement of non-financial assets as part of the process of updating the 1993 SNA. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/citygroup/non-financial-assets.htm.	Representatives from 14 countries, six international organizations and individual expert advisers.	Contributions to the methodological recommendations that feed into the process of updating the 1993 SNA on various asset-related issues. Numerous papers written and expert comments provided.
Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics		
Established in 1997 as an international forum to exchange experience in the measurement of the informal sector and in the concept of informal employment, to document data-collection practices, including the definitions and survey methodologies used by member countries and to recommend measures to improve the quality and comparability of informal sector statistics. http://www.mospi.nic.in/mospi_informal_sector.htm.	Experts from 24 national statistical offices, five international organizations and eight academic institutions.	Contributions to the development of standards for the concept and measurement of the informal sector that would be acceptable to most stakeholders. The group has produced papers for its annual meetings since 1997 dealing with various aspects of informal sector statistics.
London Group on Environmental Accounting		
Created in 1993 to provide an informed forum for practitioners to share experience of developing and implementing environmental satellite accounts linked to the economic accounts of the System of National Accounts; to play a leadership role in defining international best practices in the theory and practice of environmental accounting within the framework of the System of National Accounts; to provide a forum for the sharing of national and international expertise in this field; and to encourage the adoption of best practices in the field. http://www4.statcan.ca/citygrp/london/london.htm.	Representatives from 20 national statistical offices and four international organizations.	Played a leadership role in developing definitions and international recommendations of environmental accounting in consistency with the framework of the System of National Accounts; contributed to the development of the SEEA Handbook.

Objective/date of creation/website	*Membership*	*Product/output/main achievements*
Ottawa Group on Price Indexes		
Set up in 1994, the Group provides a forum for specialists and practitioners to exchange experiences and thoughts on problems of measuring price change. The main focus of the Group is on applied research in the area of consumer price indexes. The proceedings from the sessions are published and disseminated. The Group may also assemble and publish compendiums of materials related to specific topics of price statistics. http://www.ottawagroup.org/.	Experts from more than 26 countries and five international organizations. Specialists actively involved in the application of the principles relating to the topics under discussion are invited to the Group's meetings.	Participating experts shared their experience and the outcome of their research on crucial problems of measuring price change, contributing to the spreading of progressive methods in price indexes from countries with more advanced methodology and practice to others.
Paris Group on Labour and Compensation		
Created in 1997 to examine, assess and reconcile the various sources of information used to measure labour market conditions and compensation, particularly in the context of the deregulation of labour markets and structural unemployment, and to help to improve concepts and their implementation as well as the construction of new indicators. Its broad area of interest is labour and compensation. Since 2002, activities of the Group have been coordinated by a bureau consisting of representatives from two international organizations (OECD and Eurostat) and from four national statistical institutes (France-INSEE, United Kingdom-ONS, Statistics Sweden, Hungarian Central Statistical Office). The secretariat of the bureau is provided by INSEE, OECD and ONS. http://www.insee.fr/en/nom_def_met/colloques/citygroup/citygroup.htm.	Labour statisticians belonging to 23 national statistical offices and three international organizations (OECD, ILO and Eurostat).	Contributed to improving concepts and their implementation as well as the construction of new indicators in labour statistics; most recently provided proposals for the updating of working time measurement in the System of National Accounts, 1993.
Rio Group on Poverty Statistics		
Created in 1995 to study the statistical consequences of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995); to make proposals on the use of statistical information to follow up and monitor the objectives and goals approved at those meetings; to	22 countries, 19 international agencies and other institutions.	Contributed to the development of a handbook on poverty statistics methodology and measurement. The Group finalized a compendium of best practices on poverty measurement in 2005, available on its website.

Objective/date of creation/website	*Membership*	*Product/output/main achievements*
harness the experience and concerns of different groups and organizations in the world that are working on the measurement, interpretation and use of poverty statistics, especially when such work is done by or in close contact with statistical offices. http://www.ibge.gov.br/poverty.		
Round Table on Business Survey Frames Established in 1986, the Round Table on Business Survey Frames is an informal body. Its purpose is to provide a forum where officials from national and international statistical organizations can exchange views and experiences and conduct joint experiments on topics related to the development, maintenance and use of business registers to support survey sampling and other statistical activities related to the production of business statistics. http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/dsis/businessurvey/info/data/links.htm.	17 countries and three international agencies participated at the 2005 meeting.	Contributed to the development, maintenance and use of business registers to support survey sampling and the production of business statistics through sharing national experience with other countries that have less advanced methodology and practice; thus contributed to the spreading of more advanced methodology and practice in creating business registers and in conducting and organizing business surveys.
Voorburg Group on Service Statistics Established in 1986 as an initiative in response to the observation that service statistics were less developed than statistics in other economic fields although services contributed already over half of the gross domestic product in many countries. Its broad objective is to address issues related to the production of services statistics, including service product outputs and inputs, the estimation of the real product of service activities, price indexes of service products and industries and their implications for product and industry classifications, the Central Product Classification (CPC) and the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC). The Group's main purpose remains to provide an informal forum for the exchange of views on services statistics. http://www4.statcan.ca/english/voorburg/.	32 countries and six international organizations.	Contributed to the development of product and activity classifications, mainly CPC and ISIC, and provided expert advice for the development of other reference classifications (ISCO and HS). Through its discussions and research, assisted countries and international organizations in the development of guidelines and handbooks in the field of service statistics.

Objective/date of creation/website	*Membership*	*Product/output/main achievements*
Oslo Group on Energy Statistics		
Established in 2005 to address methodological issues related to energy statistics and to contribute to improved international standards and improved methods for official energy statistics by pooling expertise in the energy community. Terms of reference available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/citygroup/oslo.htm.	Energy statistics experts from national statistical offices, energy ministries and other authorities, international organizations and academia.	Recently established expert group expected to contribute to improved international standards and improved methods for official energy statistics.

B. Intersecretariat working groups and task forces

Objective/date of creation/website	*Membership*	*Product/output/main achievements*
Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts		
Created in 1983 with the original mandate to update and clarify the System of National Accounts, 1968 and harmonize it with other international statistical standards. Coordinates the implementation and methodological development of the System of National Accounts 1993. Its work is supported by the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts. Plans, organizes and coordinates the updating of the System of National Accounts, 1993. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/iswgna.htm.	Eurostat, OECD, IMF, UNSD and World Bank.	Maintains a leadership role in the development and implementation of standards globally; published handbooks on national accounting. Continues to provide the coordination of the updating of the System of National Accounts, 1993.
Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics		
Created in 1999 to develop and document best practice guidelines on concepts and methods of price statistics. Specifically, its terms of reference included the revision of the consumer price index manual and the development of the producer price index manual. After that work was completed in 2004, its focus turned to developing a revised export and import price index manual. For that purpose a Technical Expert Group was created, whose	IMF, ILO, Eurostat, OECD, UNECE and World Bank.	Developed the consumer price index manual and the producer price index manual (both published in 2004).

Objective/date of creation/website	Membership	Product/output/main achievements
members are from IMF, Australia-ABS, United Kingdom-ONS, United States-BLS, University of British Columbia and University of California, Davis. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc05/2005-9e.pdf.		
Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics Established in 2004 to firmly anchor environment statistics as part of official statistics by enhancing, coordinating and harmonizing (a) the development of methodological practices, (b) data collection and dissemination, (c) training and capacity-building programmes, thus improving and strengthening basic environmental data at both the national and international levels. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/coordination.htm.	Organizations with international programmes on environment statistics. The current members are the United Nations Statistics Division, UNECE, UNEP, OECD, FAO and Eurostat.	Contributed to improved official statistics on the environment at both the national and international levels.
Inter-Agency Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics Formed in 1991 at the request of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade the objectives of the Task Force are to improve the availability and quality of international merchandise trade statistics, in particular of the United Nations Comtrade database, and to update methodology of international merchandise statistics in view of new developments in world trade and country compilation practices. The work of the Task Force focuses, at present, on the maintenance of a common data set, the preparation of a supplement to the compilers manual on international merchandise trade statistics and reviewing related methodological and technical issues. http://imts.wto.org.	Eurostat, FAO, IMF, ITC, OECD, UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNSD, World Trade Organization and the United Nations regional commissions.	Contributed to improving and updating the methodology of international merchandise trade statistics, in particular through developing and maintaining the United Nations Comtrade database.

Objective/date of creation/website	*Membership*	*Product/output/main achievements*
Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics		
Established in 1992 and reconvened in 1998 as a mechanism for the development of a more integrated work programme among international organizations in financial statistics; to serve as a forum to address issues pertaining to external debt statistics, to develop guidelines for the compilation and use of external debt statistics and to continue to develop the joint BIS-IMF-OECD-World Bank statistics on external debt; and to coordinate work to improve the methodological soundness, transparency, timeliness and availability of external debt statistics. http://www.imf.org/external/np/sta/ed/ed.htm.	IMF, Bank for International Settlements, the Commonwealth Secretariat, European Central Bank, Eurostat, OECD, UNCTAD, Paris Club secretariat and World Bank.	Developed and published, in 2003, guidelines on the compilation and use of external debt statistics. Supported the preparation of the data quality assessment framework for external debt statistics.
Inter-Agency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services		
Formed in 1994 at the request of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the objectives of the Task Force include the development of methodological recommendations for the compilation of international trade in services statistics, focusing on the statistical requirements of the General Agreement on Trade in Services, balance of payments statistics and national accounts. A major objective of the Task Force has been the development of the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services. The current work of the Task Force focuses on the promotion of the implementation of the manual, its revision and development of compilation guidance documents. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradeserv/taskforce.htm.	Eurostat, IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, UNSD and WTO.	Developed the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services published in 2002; continues to promote the implementation of the manual.
Task Force to Establish Standards on Data and Metadata Exchange		
Launched in 2001, the goal of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange initiative is to explore common e-standards and ongoing standardization activities that could allow national and international organizations to gain efficiencies and avoid duplication of work by taking advantage of existing and emerging exchange protocols, dissemination formats and e-standards.	The initiative is sponsored by the Bank for International Settlements, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, IMF, OECD, the United Nations and the World Bank.	Contributed to establishing common e-standards that could allow national and international organizations to gain efficiencies and avoid duplication of work.

Objective/date of creation/website	*Membership*	*Product/output/main achievements*
Terms of reference: (a) To minimize the duplication of data and metadata collections; (b) To maximize the coherence of data sets disseminated by various international organizations on the same subject matter; (c) To improve the accessibility and interpretability of statistics disseminated by international organizations; (d) To automate data exchange processes and gain efficiency from the use of up-to-date information and communication technology tools. http://www.sdmx.org/.		
Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting		
Created in 2005, its objectives are: (a) to mainstream environmental-economic accounting and related statistics; (b) to elevate the System of Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting to an international statistical standard; and (c) to advance the implementation of the SEEA in countries. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envAccounting/ceea/default.asp.	25 countries and international organizations.	Recently created committee expected to contribute to the further development of the environmental accounting framework.
Intersecretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics		
Initiated in 2005 to enhance the coordination of international energy statistics and collaboration by international (global, regional and sectoral) organizations with a view to improving the availability and quality of international energy statistics, without increasing the response burden on countries, while making the best use of resources. Draft terms of reference are available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc06/2006-10e-SG-EnergyStats.pdf.	Major producers and users of international energy statistics.	Recently created Intersecretariat Working Group expected to contribute to improving the availability and quality of international energy statistics.